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## Preface

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## Preface

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In a rapidly-changing world with its incessant flows of commodities, values and people, the awareness of our overall global complexity and entangledness is growing. So is a consciousness of the role that cultural heritage plays in identity building and self-reassurance about the human condition. Museums and collections seem to be gaining momentum globally in this process. The entwined histories of migrating people and objects are displayed as stories about their multiple trajectories from places of origin into European museum collections. Collaborative academic research is urgently needed to understand, document and shape this process.

Understood against this background – and referring to a concept put forward by the British anthropologist Paul Basu – European museums host ‘object diasporas’. These urge us to listen to each other and discuss their varying contexts of origin, along with wider concerns around former and modern meanings of collections. Basu’s conceptualisation describes collections as historically-grown remittances of the communities of origin in Western museums, from which there is a duty to collaborate on issues of their exploration, on access to collections, on questions of sovereignty in interpretation – as well as the emerging sensitive suggestion, in certain cases, of restitution – or at least digital repatriation.

In December 2016 the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich was honoured to host a pioneering conference on museum cooperation between Africa and Europe. The spirit of its highly-engaged discussions and debates provided a deeply inspiring experience; this volume is one of the conference’s many potential outcomes. I warmly thank all the contributors for their dedication and open-mindedness, as well as the energy they put into finalising their chapters.

This anthology is intended to address not only theories around museum cooperation, but especially to foreground, critically discuss and further develop current topics on the issue, as well as developing further projects and the practice of cooperating. The goal of this young – yet generation-spanning movement – and of this volume, is clear and farsighted: to make some first steps towards long-overdue natural, well-funded and sustainable academic collaborations between European and African museums. I hope this volume will help to pave the way!

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*Zürich, February 2018*